



PRESS RELEASE

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“OPERATION TARMAC” **AIRPORT EMPLOYEES ARRESTED AND** **CHARGED WITH PHONY DOCUMENTS**

Fort Myers -- Paul I. Perez, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, Steven J. Trent, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Tampa, Florida, and Roland H. Haye, Special Agent in Charge, Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, Office of Investigations, Atlanta Division, announced the unsealing of indictments and the arrest of eight people during the last 24 hours based on the investigation by a joint inter-agency task force that spearheaded Operation Tarmac. The purpose of Operation Tarmac is to ensure the public safety at major airports by checking the identification and access cards of those employees who work in restricted areas.

During the last six months, the task force investigated instances of identity fraud and false statements used by individuals to obtain employment and access to restricted areas of Southwest Florida Regional International Airport in Fort Myers, Florida. Previously, in February 2003, numerous individuals who worked at the airports in Jacksonville, Orlando,

Tampa, and Sarasota/Bradenton were arrested as part of Operation Tarmac. The investigation at Southwest Florida Regional International Airport focused on those persons who requested Security Identification Display Area badges, commonly known as SIDA badges. These badges provide the holder with access to restricted and secure areas at the airport. Those areas include aircraft parking and maintenance areas, the tarmac and ramp, cargo storage facilities, and passenger and baggage screening areas. As of noon today, 8 of the 13 individuals indicted have been arrested by local, state, and federal agents.

The participating agencies in Operation Tarmac are: U.S. Attorney's Office; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, Office of Investigations; Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Regional Domestic Security Task Force; Transportation Security Administration; Lee County Port Authority Police; and U.S. Marshal's Service.

According to the indictments, a number of the defendants knowingly and falsely represented a Social Security Account number to be the number assigned to him or her with the intent to deceive and obtain employment at the airport. Some of those indicted were charged with making false statements on an Employment Eligibility Verification, Form I-9, in that they falsely claimed that they were lawful permanent residents or had authorization to work. Some of those indicted were charged with using or possessing false identification documents such as a false Resident Alien card in order to obtain employment at the airport. The maximum penalty for these charges, if convicted, is five years' imprisonment, and a fine of not more than \$250,000. The following individuals have been arrested at this time: Harry Derolus, age 36, Bernier Lavoile, age 48, Yolaine Prophete, age 44, Cinna Desire, age 58, Carole Laurent, age 38, Walker Laime, age 35, Francisco

Sanchez, age 28, and Felipe Gonzalez Molina, age 28.

There is no evidence to suggest that any of the individuals charged today are related to any terrorist organizations or intended to commit any acts of terrorism. Those charged were employees who had a variety of jobs that included: custodian, contract worker, and construction worker.

This operation highlights the need for all employers to be more vigilant in verifying the identity, status, and social security number of individuals being hired in all work environments, not just those directly related to airport security. Social Security offers both small and large employers the opportunity to verify employees social security numbers by call a toll-free number 1-800-772-6270.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.

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